

INSIDE PEACE CORPS

Chief Executive Officer's Message

Welcome back to *Inside Peace Corps*, where we share updates on our work, both at headquarters and in the countries where our Volunteers are invited to serve. Yesterday, we celebrated World AIDS Day to honor those we have lost due to the disease and to recognize the substantial progress that has been made toward ending the epidemic over the last 40 years. I am so grateful for the contributions community members, counterparts, partners, staff, and returned Volunteers of the Peace Corps network have made toward supporting those living with HIV and raising awareness to prevent new infections.

The World AIDS Day theme this year was “Global solidarity, shared responsibility,” a theme I know resonates deeply with the Peace Corps network, especially during this time of unrelenting change. Our shifting reality – whether due to global health crises, new COVID-19 variants, climate change, or a need for social reform – is shared. And I am so grateful to be among a community that cherishes human relationships, challenges the status quo, and collaborates toward an improved future for all. I hope you each have a safe, healthy, and peaceful holiday season.

Join Us!

The Peace Corps invites you to watch the just-premiered **Peace Corps Response to COVID Documentary**, featuring the domestic deployment of Peace Corps Response Volunteers this year through a partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. You are also invited to register for our upcoming **Thought Leaders Series** event on December 9.

Developments

Progress toward Returning Volunteers to Service Overseas. Following the global evacuation, the Peace Corps developed robust health, safety, and security standards that must be met prior to Volunteers returning to countries of service. A total of eight Peace Corps posts have met these criteria and there are many more approaching this stage. So far, invitations have been sent to prospective Volunteers, both new and returning, to serve in Belize, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Zambia, with more invitations forthcoming. These Volunteers have been invited to serve beginning in late January to March so long as conditions allow. As part of the Peace Corps' return to service, all Volunteers will be expected to contribute to COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. In addition, Volunteers will be required to accept the additional risks associated with volunteering during a pandemic and comply with agency standards for mitigating these risks, wherever possible. Click [here](#) for more information on our return to service.

Input Requested for Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response Program Roadmap. From December 2 through December 16, the Peace Corps is seeking public input as staff develop a 2022 roadmap to strengthen the Sexual Assault Risk Reduction and Response (SARRR) program. Specific suggestions for how the agency can enhance its systems to mitigate the risk of sexual assault and to provide victim-centered and trauma-informed care to survivors can be emailed to SARRRinput@peacecorps.gov. For more information, read the related press release [here](#).

New Opportunities to Engage in Virtual Service. Partners from 28 countries and more than 230 returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) have engaged in the Virtual Service Pilot (VSP) since October 2020, demonstrating that collaboration and service can be impactful over digital platforms and across time zones. The Peace Corps is now accepting expressions of interest from any RPCV who is prepared to spend five to 15 hours per week donating their time and engaging with a host country partner for the fourth phase of the Pilot. Learn more about VSP by reading stories of past participants and exploring current engagement opportunities [here](#).

Staff Contributions to the Global HIV Response. Globally, staff have made meaningful contributions to advance the Peace Corps mission during this time without Volunteers overseas, including in the area of global HIV response. Staff from the 13 Peace Corps posts with President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) programs provided programming to over 63,000 individuals, including over 40,000 orphans and vulnerable children in fiscal year 2021. For example, in Cameroon, staff have collaborated with a partner to implement health training for youth related to gender and HIV prevention. For more information on the Peace Corps' PEPFAR programming, click [here](#).

Additional Employee Resource Group for Peace Corps Staff. The Peace Corps' newest Employee Resource Group (ERG), Indigenous Rising, was chartered and approved on November 1, the first day of Native American Heritage Month. This ERG offers a space for honoring and recognizing Peace Corps staff who identify as indigenous as well as allies. Like the Peace Corps' other eight ERGs, Indigenous Rising provides a platform for developing internal leaders, ensures diverse voices and perspectives are included, valued, and respected in our collective work, and contributes to an organizational culture of equity and inclusion.

Build Day with Peace Corps Partner, SolarSPELL at Arizona State University. Last month, RPCVs, Peace Corps Prep participants, and SolarSPELL of Arizona State University staff collaborated on a **build day** where participants assembled libraries. SolarSPELL, a strategic partner of the Peace Corps, offers curated digital libraries, solar-powered, offline technology, and training to build information literacy and internet-ready skills. For more than six years, SolarSPELL has worked closely with the Peace Corps to leverage digital content and build information literacy skills through a train-the-trainer model. For more information on this partnership, read [here](#).



The Peace Corps in Photos

In the Works

Meeting the Well-Being and Mental Health Needs of Volunteers – The Peace Corps is introducing a comprehensive suite of services and resources designed to meet the clinical and non-clinical well-being and mental health needs of Volunteers. Recognizing the compounding stressors associated with the pandemic, racial injustice, and social unrest as well as additional challenges that may emerge during service, the agency, through the many suggestions it has received from RPCVs and stakeholders, identified areas it could supplement its existing offerings to support Volunteers' adjustment and integration into the communities they serve. In addition, the new initiatives are designed to offer trauma-informed response and continuity of care to Volunteers who may experience crimes during service, including sexual assault. New, non-clinical services and resources include well-being tele-coaching, resilience training for Volunteers, and confidential, psychosocial impact assessments for Volunteers and posts. Additional clinical initiatives involve an expanded network of vetted mental health professionals for care during and after service as well as annual Peace Corps Medical Officer refresher trainings around trauma-informed care. In addition, the agency is strengthening the systems of behavioral health communication, processes, and capacity used for care transitions such as when a Volunteer is medically evacuated or when a Volunteer experiences a crime.

Developing an Ethical Storytelling Approach and Tool Kit – The Peace Corps is developing new materials designed to support storytelling about the Peace Corps experience in alignment with the agency's core values of intercultural competence, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (ICDEIA) as well as the centrality of relationships. The Peace Corps' approach to Ethical Storytelling is intended to equip Peace Corps storytellers with tools to intentionally and respectfully tell the innumerable stories that stem from Peace Corps service, interactions, and partnerships. Through pilot workshops with staff and RPCV stakeholders this winter, the Peace Corps is collecting feedback and best practices that will be incorporated into an Ethical Storytelling Tool Kit which will be made available to the broader Peace Corps network during Peace Corps Week 2022.

Upgrading the Peace Corps' Reporting Systems for Staff and Volunteers – After two years of collaboration among staff across the agency, the Peace Corps is excited to announce the launch of a streamlined data collection system, Volunteer Reporting and Grants (VRG), which unifies reporting and grant management systems previously used by staff and Volunteers. VRG enables users to seamlessly plan, manage, and share their projects and results, including those funded by small grants and those implemented in collaboration with community partners. With the new system, Volunteers will track their activities, conduct quarterly reporting, and manage grant applications through their Volunteer portal. Meanwhile, staff will monitor Volunteers' activities and grants as well as manage projects, grant programs, and provide technical assistance through the system. Through the efforts of VRG Business Champions from 20 posts and full-scale pilots at six posts, the system has been fine-tuned for optimal functionality and for robust data collection, analysis, and information sharing. Also, the system will be regularly improved to meet the evolving needs of its users. For example, the VRG was recently adapted to enable the reporting and sharing of staff-led activities. Now that the system is fully launched, all staff required to use the system will be trained beginning in January 2022, and Volunteers will be introduced to the system as they return to service overseas. Watch this [video](#) to hear why VRG Business Champion staff from around the world are excited about the new system.

In the News

The Peace Corps is making headlines! Here are a few recent stories.
(Clicking any of the news links will take you to a third-party website.)

National Public Radio

[The Colorado 'Solar Garden' is Literally a Farm Under Solar Panels](#)

The Paradise

[Peace Corps Helps Launch Vaccination Campaign in Commune of Mantasoa](#)

The Columbus Dispatch

[Afghanistan 50 Years Ago Described in Autobiographical Book by Peace Corps Volunteer](#)



VRG brings people and data together and the most important [thing] is that, behind digits and big data, we see people. So, I value this.

– Oksana Yurchuk, Small Project Assistance Coordinator, Peace Corps/Ukraine

Stories

In recognition of Veterans Day last month and World AIDS Day yesterday, we highlight two RPCVs' stories.



[My Journey from Inner-City Detroit to Military Service and the Peace Corps](#)



[Working Towards an HIV-Free Generation](#)

[Read more stories →](#)

Events

The Peace Corps and its partners host a variety of events. Check out recent and upcoming virtual events involving the Peace Corps:

October 27 – The Administration's FY22 Budget Request for the Peace Corps, Development Finance Corporation, and Millennium Challenge Corporation (recording)

December 2 – Documentary Premiere: Peace Corps Response to COVID (video)

December 8 – RPCV Story Slam: Why I Chose Peace Corps Service (registration)

December 9 – It's Not Just an Environmental Thing: RPCVs Tackling Climate Change Across Sectors (registration)

December 28 – Peace Corps Celebrates: Kwanzaa (registration)

[View all events →](#)

Survey

If you have not already done so, the Peace Corps encourages all RPCVs to consider completing the **RPCV Survey** of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA). This information will help NPCA document the multifaceted benefits of Peace Corps service – both immediate and long-term – to RPCVs, their families, their communities, and society more broadly.



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